BROTHER THEOPHANE

C. M. Millen • *Illustrated by* Andrea Wisnewski

This book belongs to:

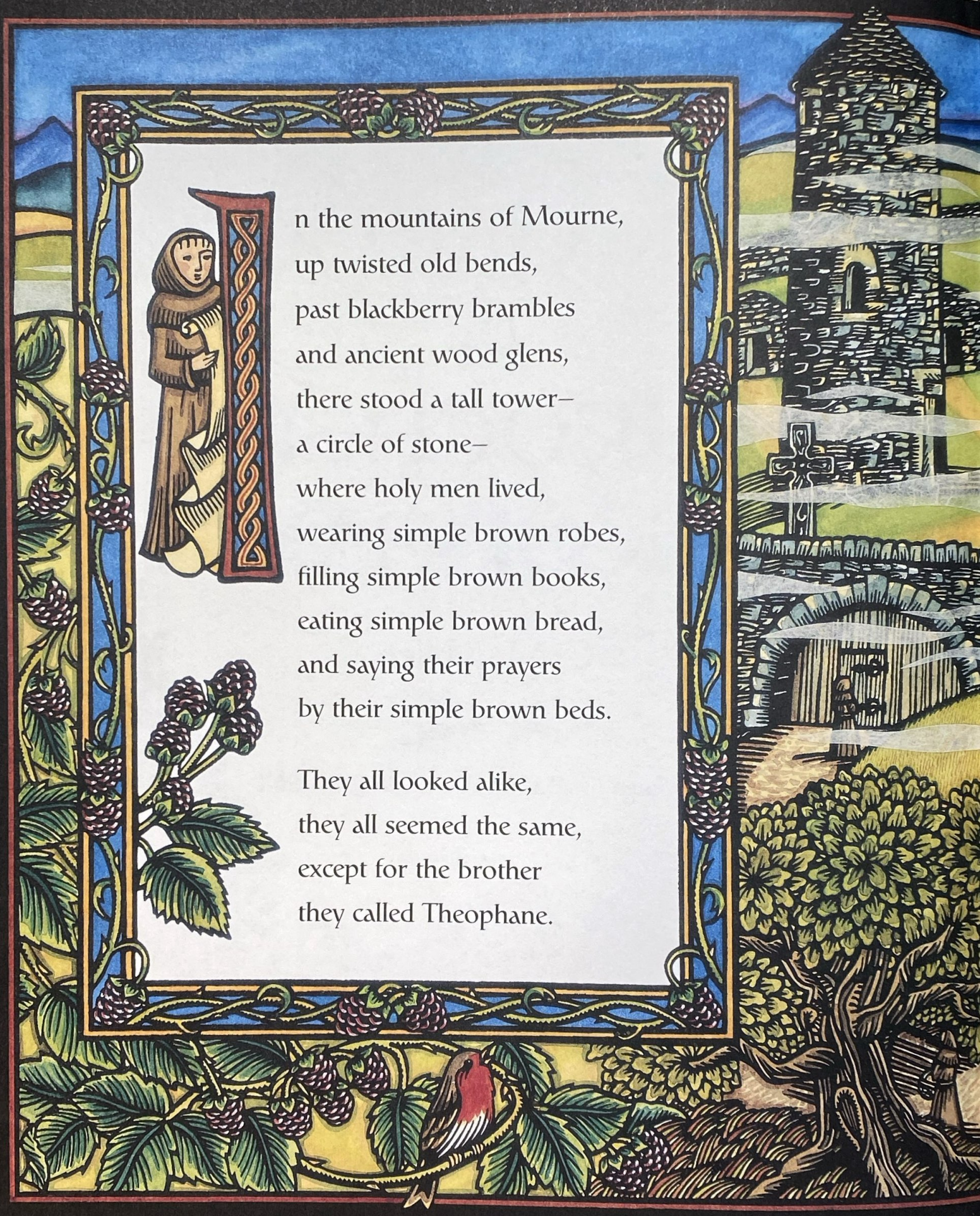
_____

The Ink Garden of Brother Theophane

C. M. Millen

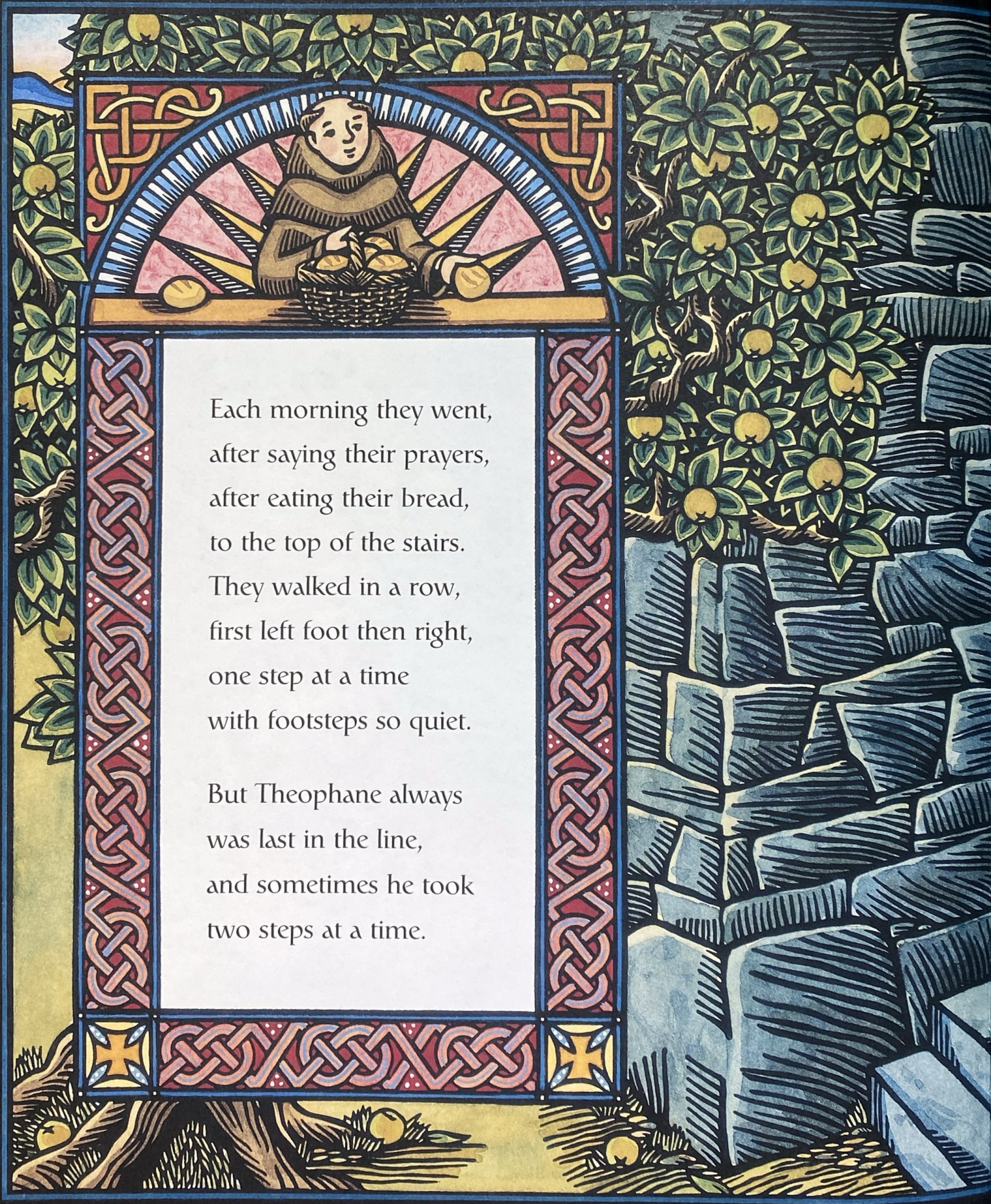
Illustrated by Andrea Wisnewski

Charlesbridge



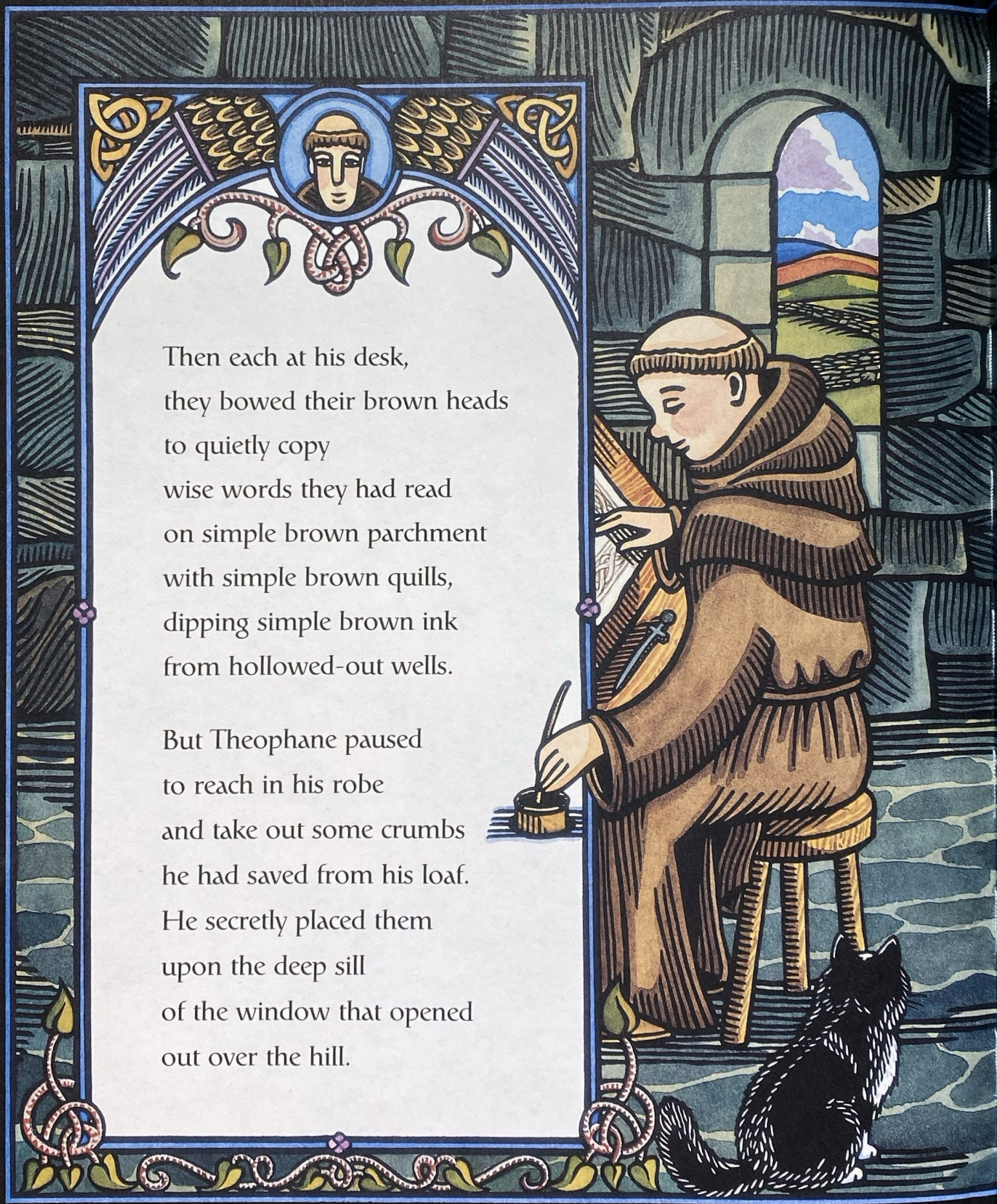
In the mountains of Mourne,
up twisted old bends,
past blackberry brambles
and ancient wood glens,
there stood a tall tower–
a circle of stone–
where holy men lived,
wearing simple brown robes,
filling simple brown books,
eating simple brown bread,
and saying their prayers
by their simple brown beds.

They all looked alike,
they all seemed the same,
except for the brother
they called Theophane.



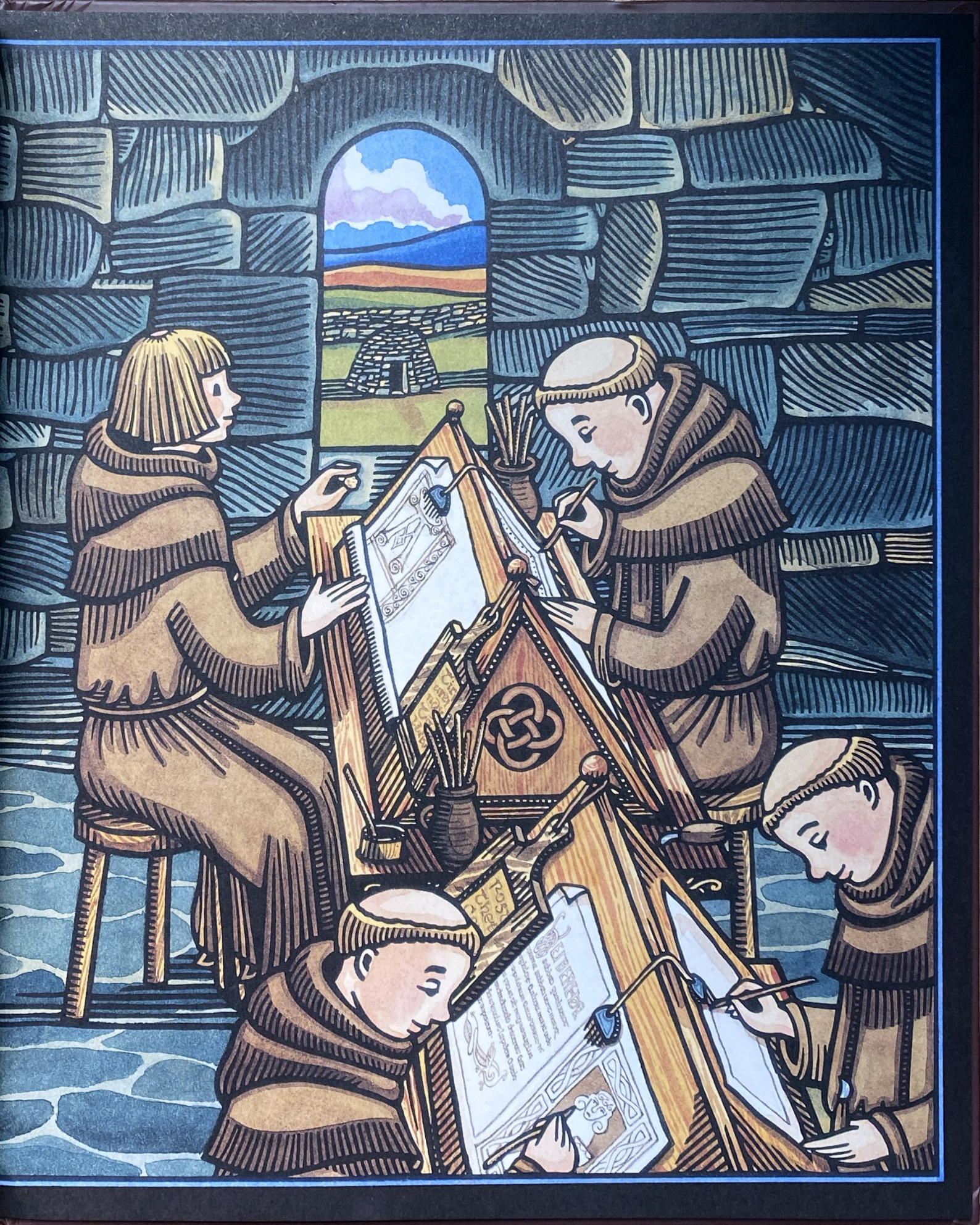
Each morning they went,
after saying their prayers,
after eating their bread,
to the top of the stairs.
They walked in a row,
first left foot then right,
one step at a time
with footsteps so quiet.

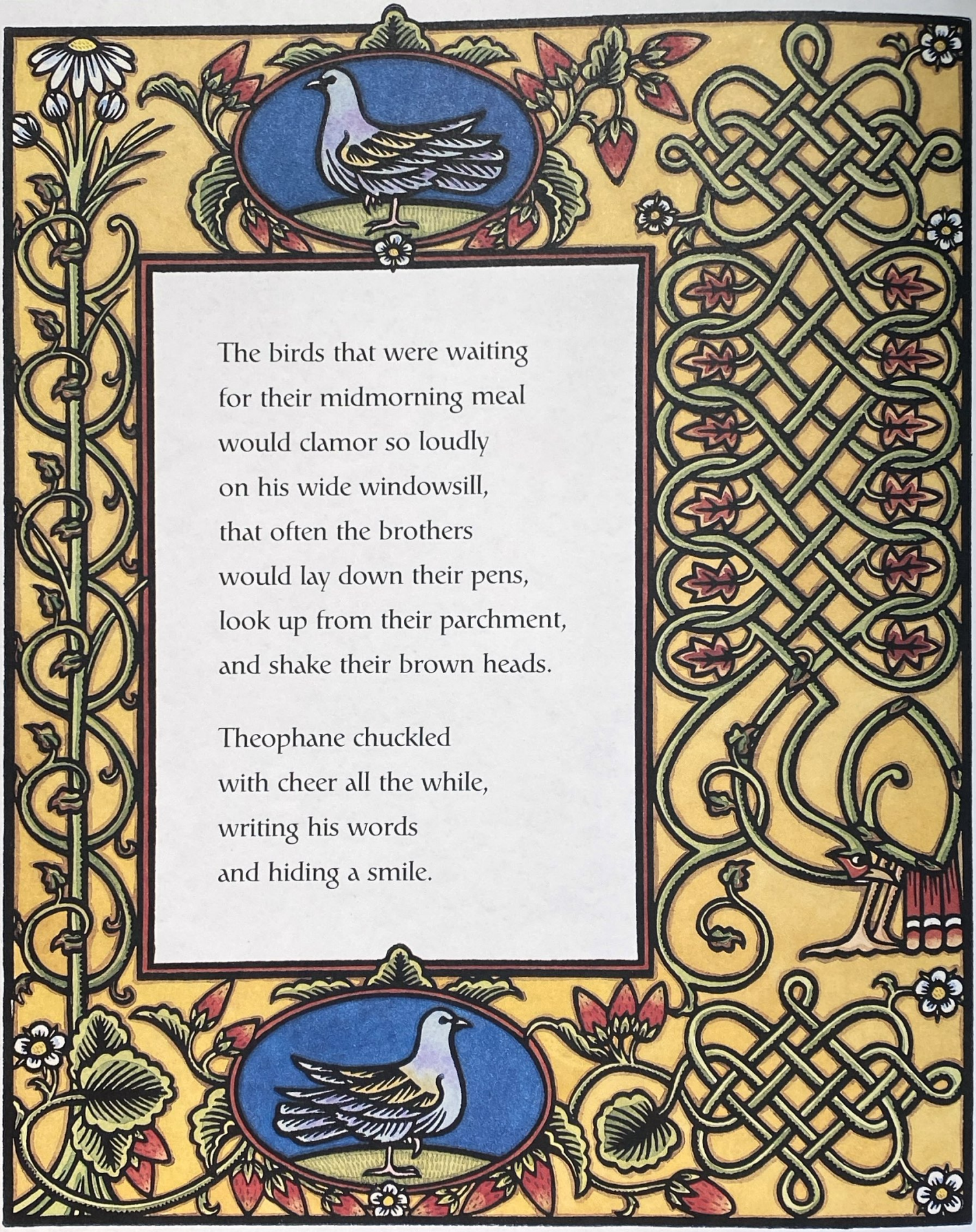
But Theophane always
was last in the line,
and sometimes he took
two steps at a time.



Then each at his desk,
they bowed their brown heads
to quietly copy
wise words they had read
on simple brown parchment
with simple brown quills,
dipping simple brown ink
from hollowed-out wells.

But Theophane paused
to reach in his robe
and take out some crumbs
he had saved from his loaf.
He secretly placed them
upon the deep sill
of the window that opened
out over the hill.





The birds that were waiting
for their midmorning meal
would clamor so loudly
on his wide windowsill,
that often the brothers
would lay down their pens,
look up from their parchment,
and shake their brown heads.

Theophane chuckled
with cheer all the while,
writing his words
and hiding a smile.

Theophane worked
at his simple brown desk,
writing simple brown writing
like all of the rest.
But Theophane just
couldn't help but observe,
outside of his window,
the flight of a bird,
or the green of the trees
on a hill far away,
or the sun shining brightly
on the top of his page.

And then he would stop
with his copying chore
to write about all
of the beauty outdoors.

How lovely it is today!
The sunlight flickers and breaks
on the margin of my lined book,
while a wall of woodland overlooks
a blackbird singing from the willow—
a bird, a branch, a mass of yellow.

Watching him closely
with a critical eye
was the eldest of brothers,
the teacher of scribes.
"Theophane, brother,
unfortunately you
don't seem to be doing
the work we must do.
It seems you must have
a new task to fulfill:
you will make the brown ink
that we use in our wells."

Theophane solemnly
slid from his chair,
laid down his pen,
and skipped down the stairs.

I render thanks for what is given—
my claw is tired from all this scribbling!

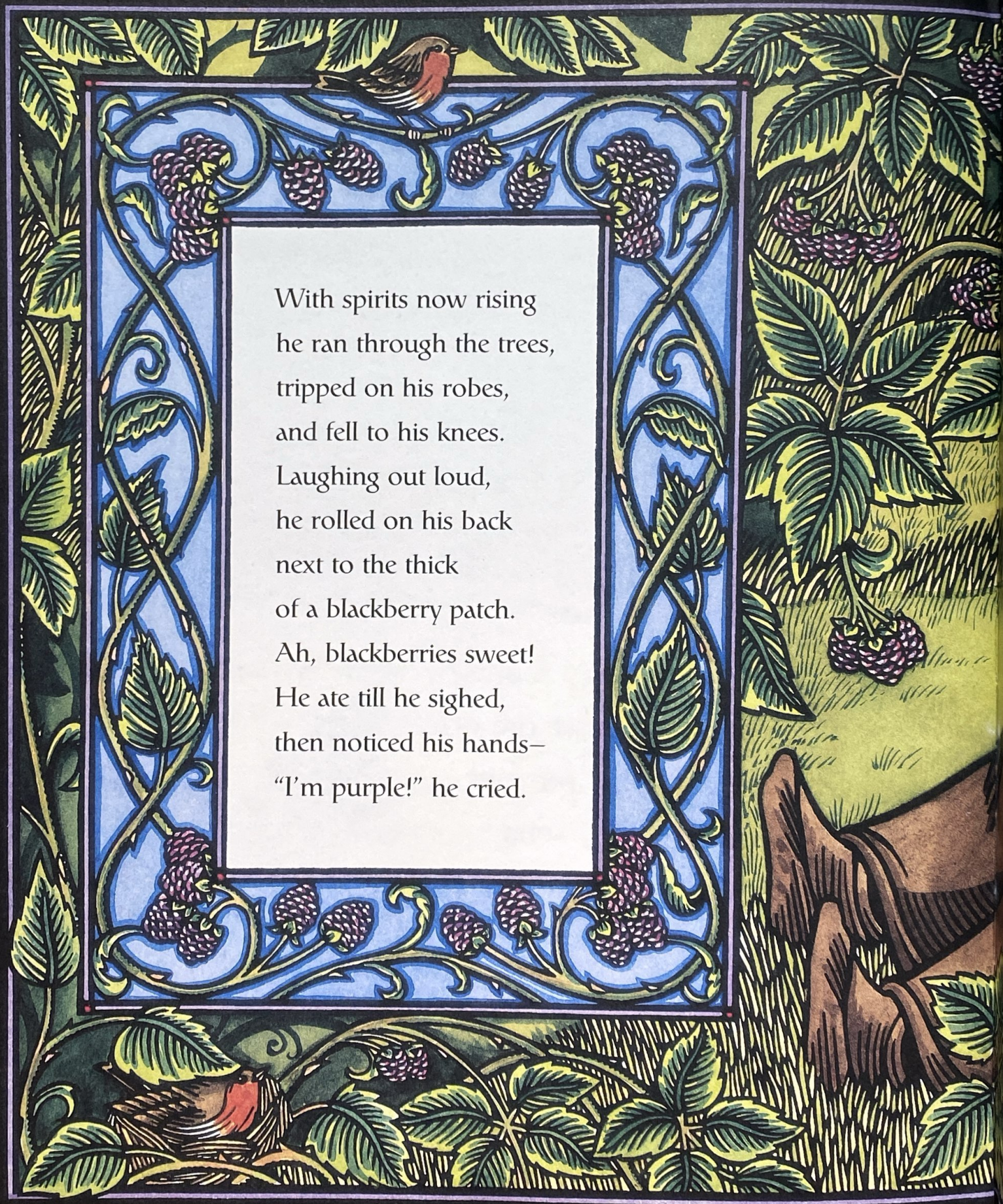
Down in the room
at the pit of the tower,
down where the ink
was made over a fire,
Theophane boiled
the cauldrons of bark,
constantly stirring
to make the ink dark.

Sweating and sleepy,
thirsty and tired,
Theophane toiled
all night at the pyre.
By morning, exhausted
and needing more bark,
he picked up three baskets
and went for a walk.

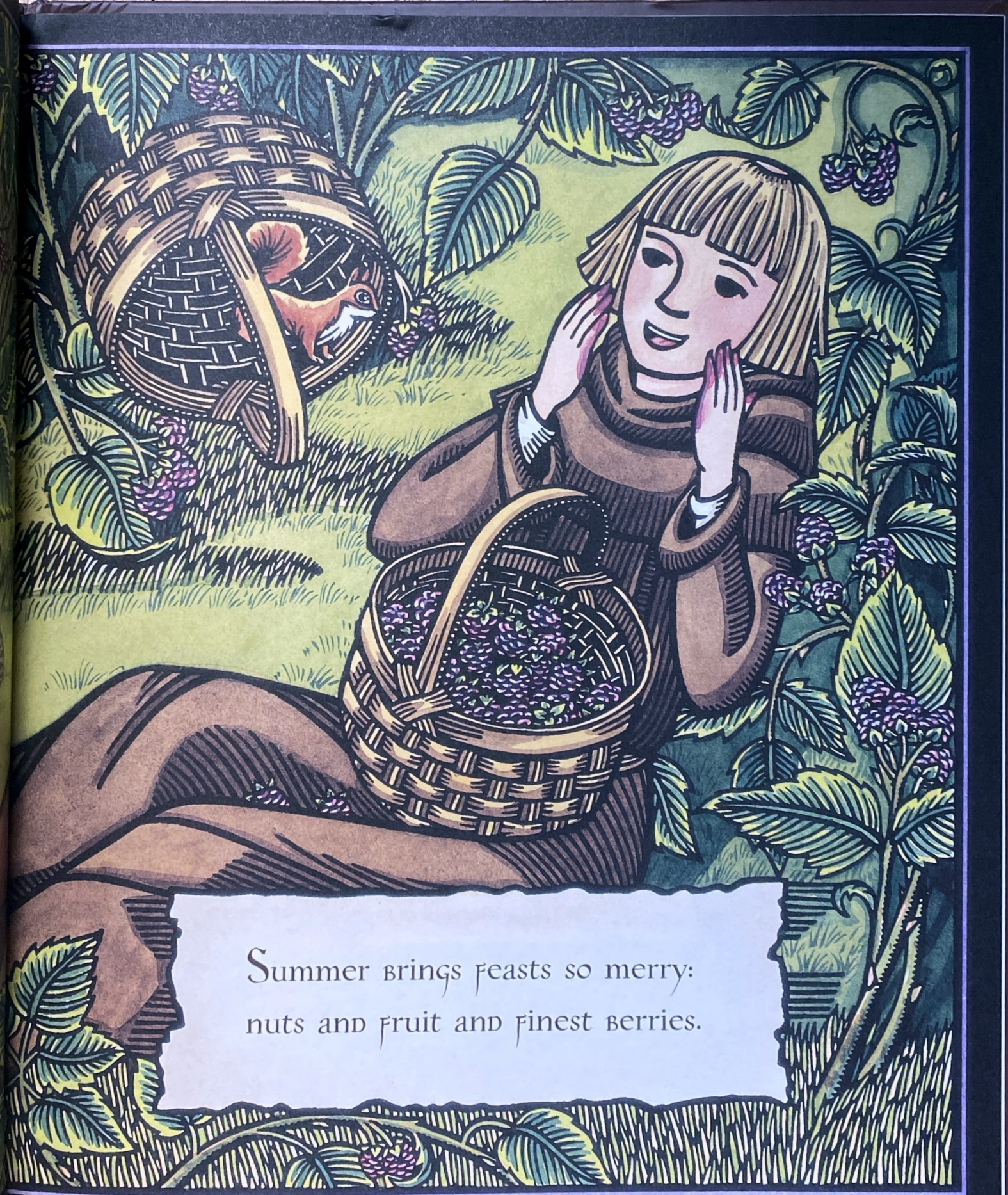
As he opened the door
a breeze kissed his brow
and removed every trace
of Theophane's frown.

With every step forward
he felt less alone–
each scent and each sound
seemed to welcome him home.

What a lovely sound:
the wind against the elm
making music for me!
What a lovely song
of the gray blackbird
as she claps her wing!
It is lovely writing out in the wood.
It is a humble, hidden house for good.



With spirits now rising
he ran through the trees,
tripped on his robes,
and fell to his knees.
Laughing out loud,
he rolled on his back
next to the thick
of a blackberry patch.
Ah, blackberries sweet!
He ate till he sighed,
then noticed his hands–
"I'm purple!" he cried.

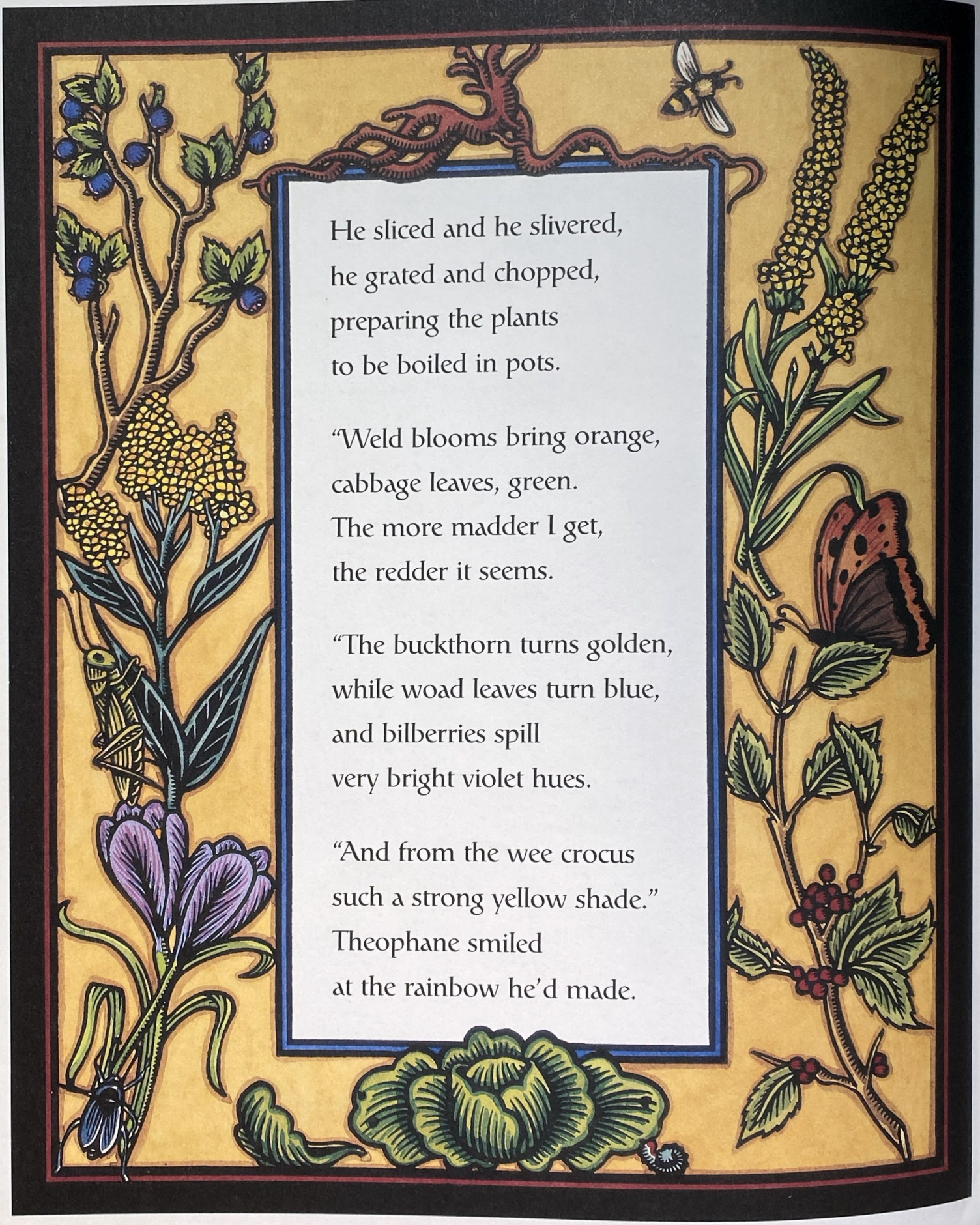

Summer brings feasts so merry:
nuts and fruit and finest berries.

"Purple from berries!"
An idea filled his mind.
"What other colors
for ink could I find?"

With baskets in tow,
he searched all around,
picking berries and leaves
and roots from the ground.

Scratched and bedraggled,
but divinely inspired,
Theophane eagerly
raced back to the fire.

Fruits of the forest
break forth in plenty:
slender green hazel
and yew-tree berries.



He sliced and he slivered,
he grated and chopped,
preparing the plants
to be boiled in pots.

"Weld blooms bring orange,
cabbage leaves, green.
The more madder I get,
the redder it seems.

"The buckthorn turns golden,
while woad leaves turn blue,
and bilberries spill
very bright violet hues.

"And from the wee crocus
such a strong yellow shade."
Theophane smiled
at the rainbow he'd made.

Lovely the cloak of colors
my Lord has thrown upon the hill,
and great is the One who dyed them
and brings them to us still.

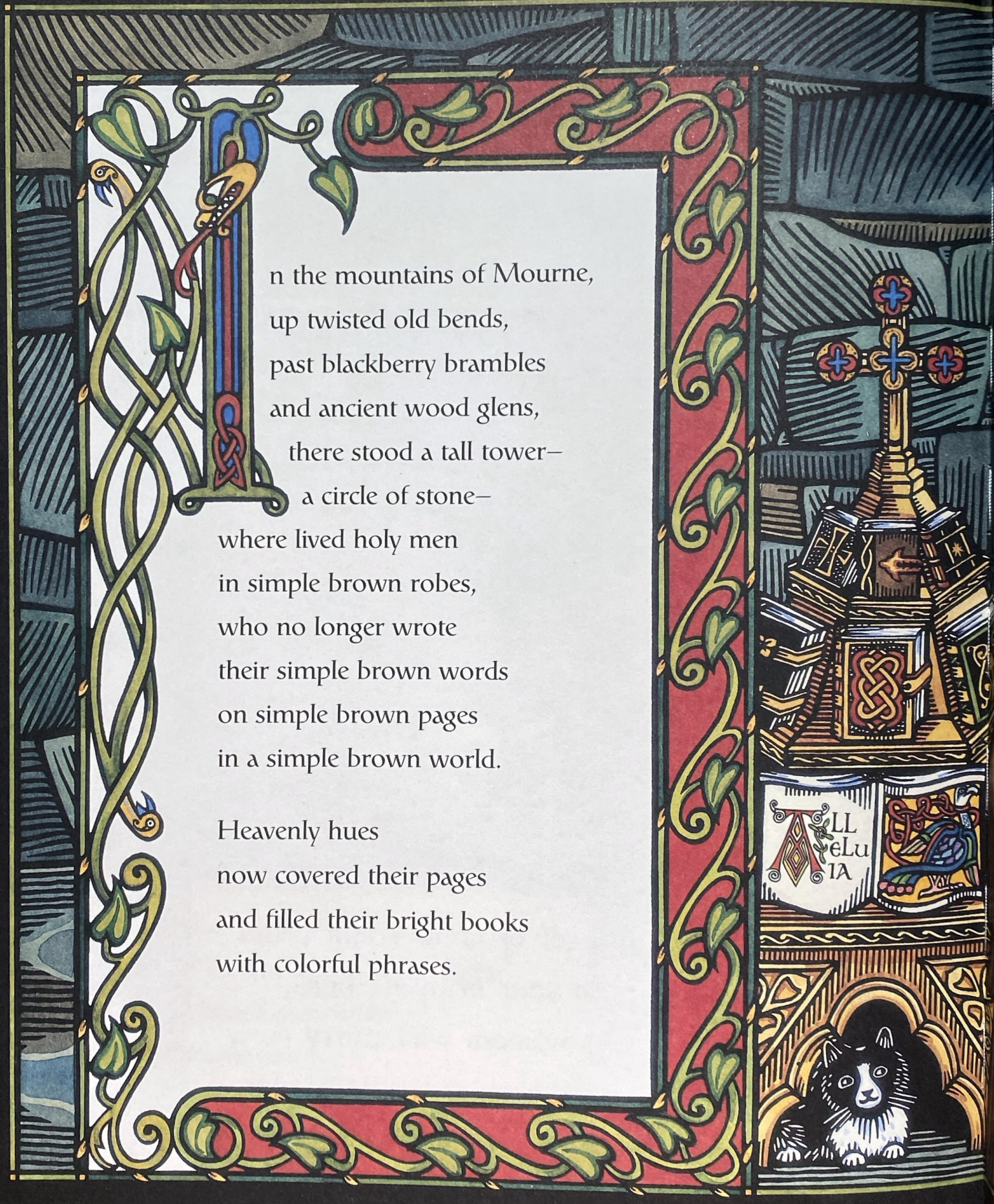
He bound up soft brushes–
no two sized the same–
of hair that he clipped
from their old donkey's mane.

Then at the long table
where he sat down to write,
Theophane dabbled
all through the night.

And when all the others
awoke from their beds
and came to the kitchen
to eat their brown bread,
they couldn't believe
what was left by their places:
Theophane's writing–
illuminated!

My thin-beaked pen does emit
bright-blue ink from its tip
or pours out steady with the green
from holly leaves and cabbage skin.

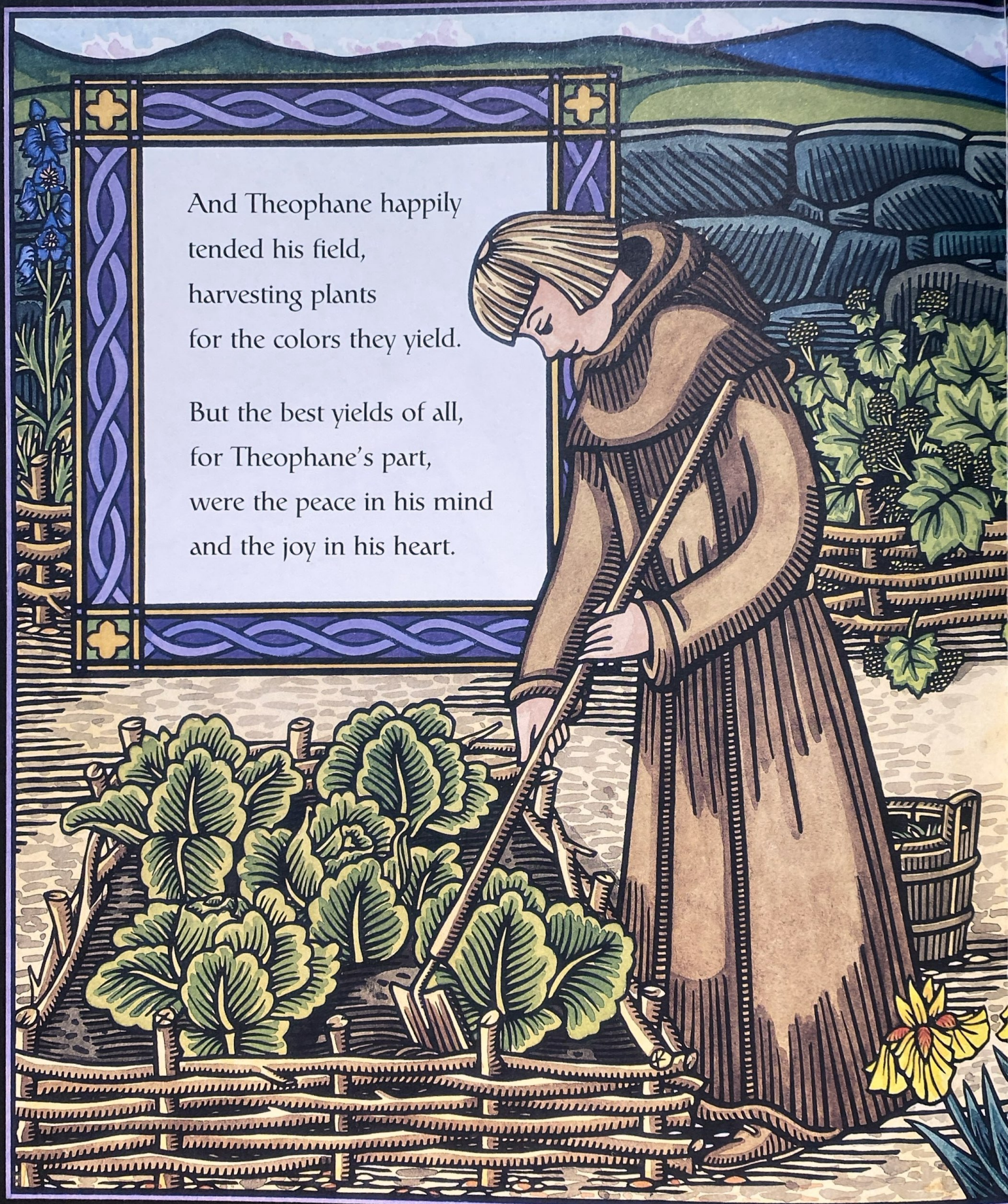
Through a set of great bright books
I will send your dripping pens;
Streams of wisdom will fairly flow
without rest from our skilled men.

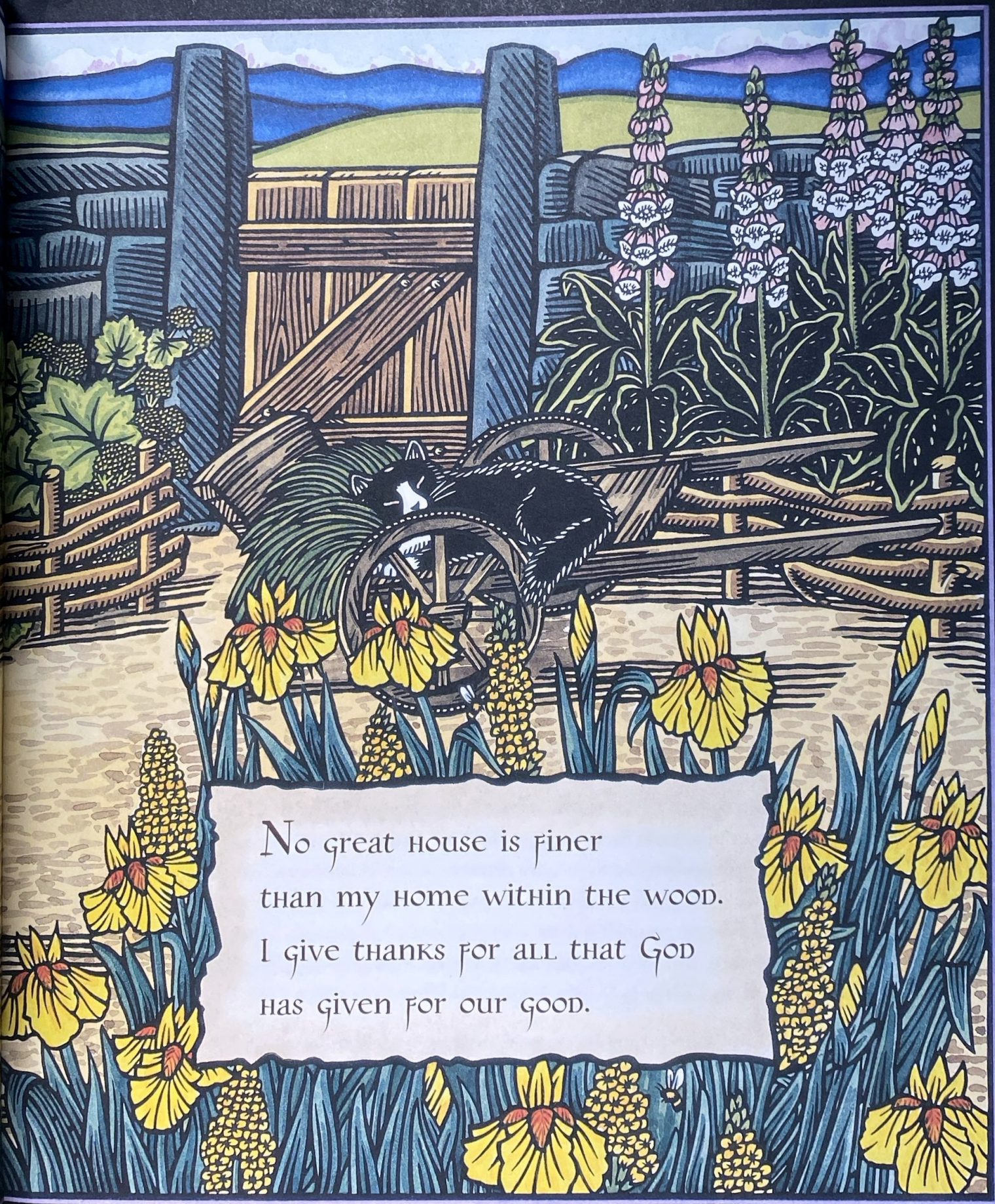


In the mountains of Mourne,
up twisted old bends,
past blackberry brambles
and ancient wood glens,
there stood a tall tower—
a circle of stone—
where lived holy men
in simple brown robes,
who no longer wrote
their simple brown words
on simple brown pages
in a simple brown world.

Heavenly hues
now covered their pages
and filled their bright books
with colorful phrases.

HIC
THE
MA
VI DE


And Theophane happily
tended his field,
harvesting plants
for the colors they yield.
But the best yields of all,
for Theophane's part,
were the peace in his mind
and the joy in his heart.


No great house is finer
than my home within the wood.
I give thanks for all that God
has given for our good.

Author's Note

Throughout the Middle Ages (500–1400 AD), monks from Ireland established monasteries throughout much of Europe and parts of the Middle East. In Ireland itself, the monks built tall tower monasteries in every part of the island, including the beautiful Mourne Mountains in the northeast.

Monasteries were the center of religious life for their communities and safe havens during times of war and famine. Most important for Western civilization, they were the place where books were made. Monks in the monasteries carefully translated and copied the great written works of antiquity—not only the Bible, but also the scholastic and literary works of the ancient Arabs, Greeks, and Romans. While much of Europe was filled with conflict and turmoil during the "Dark Ages," the simple monks kept the light of knowledge alive.

In the scriptorium ("writing place") of the monastery, monks wrote on parchment or vellum, the carefully prepared skin of a calf. They made their dark ink in different ways: some monks boiled the bark of the "thorn tree" (possibly the hawthorn tree), some mixed soot with egg white and honey, and some gathered growths from oak trees and let them rot into a black liquid.

As the monks began to illustrate or "illuminate" their writings, they created colorful paints from various minerals, herbs, shrubs, trees, berries, insects, and even snails. Like Theophane, these early chemists experimented with ingredients to create pigments for their work.* They soaked copper in vinegar, ground up dried beetles, and boiled leaves in urine in their search for brilliant, lasting colors. Their complicated and often toxic recipes resulted in colorful powders that could be mixed with egg white, honey, or other sticky liquids to make paint. As books became fancier, the illuminators also began decorating them with gold and other precious metals. The most famous of their illuminated manuscripts is the *Book of Kells*, which can be viewed at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.

To me, what is most fascinating about these monks is what they did when they were bored—they doodled on leftover scraps of parchment, or in the margins of their books. What a human and totally understandable thing to do! They noticed the

beauty outside, they complained about their hands hurting, they wrote poems about the monastery cat, and they even made fun of themselves. Thankfully, these anonymous poems have been saved and published in several books, including *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, edited and translated by Thomas Kinsella.

Theophane's poems in *The Ink Garden of Brother Theophane* are based on poems originally scribbled by medieval monks in their native Irish. Working from Mr. Kinsella's translations, I have adapted the monks' poems, combining lines from different verses and paraphrasing the language for modern reading.

Theophane (THEE-oh-fayn), a name that honors God or "Theos," was a common name for monks. I thought the character of Theophane would be perfect to represent all the monks who got bored, caused a bit of mischief, and scribbled poems about their private thoughts. Thanks to him and his "brothers," we can read what they wrote to this day.

C. M. Millen

*On the page that begins "He sliced and he slivered," Theophane experiments with the following plants (in clockwise order from the upper left): bilberries, madder roots, weld blossoms, unripe buckthorn berries, cabbage leaves, saffron crocus stamens, and woad leaves.

For More Information

BOOKS

Brown, Don. *Across a Dark & Wild Sea*. Brookfield, CT: Roaring Brook, 2002.

Kinsella, Thomas, ed. *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Nikola-Lisa, W. *Magic in the Margins: A Medieval Tale of Bookmaking*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Robertson, Bruce. *Marguerite Makes a Book*. Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999.

WEBSITES

To learn how to make your own hawthorn bark ink:
http://www.regia.org/quill3.htm

To experiment with extracting colors from plants:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/activities/3205_vinland.html

To learn how illuminated manuscripts were made:
http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/sections/making_art/manuscript.html

In loving memory of dear Mabel Best Savage, of Lurgan and Belfast, Northern Ireland. "Spread your troubles before the Lord, and trust where you cannot see." –C. M. M.

For Allison. Love, Mum. –A. W.

Special thanks to Daniel Melleno, MA and PhD candidate in Early Medieval History at the University of California–Berkeley, for his expertise and advice. Thanks also to Nancy Hanger, master weaver and spinner, for her guidance on medieval dyes and pigments.

Text copyright © 2010 by C. M. Millen
Illustrations copyright © 2010 by Andrea Wisnewski
All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.
Charlesbridge and colophon are registered trademarks of Charlesbridge Publishing, Inc.

Published by Charlesbridge
85 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
(617) 926-0329
www.charlesbridge.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Millen, C. M.
The ink garden of brother Theophane / C. M. Millen ; illustrated by Andrea Wisnewski.
p. cm.
Summary: In medieval Ireland, Theophane's boredom with his duties as a scribe distracts the other monks, but when he is sent to the kitchens he discovers that he can make inks of many colors from plants, allowing the others to illustrate their work. Includes facts about the history of monasteries, scriptoriums, and illuminated manuscripts.
ISBN 978-1-58089-179-0 (reinforced for library use)
[1. Stories in rhyme. 2. Monks–Fiction. 3. Ink–Fiction. 4. Illumination of books and manuscripts–Fiction. 5. Middle Ages–Fiction. 6. Ireland–History–To 1172–Fiction.]
I. Wisnewski, Andrea, ill. II. Title.
PZ8.3.M6115Ink 2010
[E]–dc22 2009026651

Printed in China
(hc) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Illustrations created from papercut prints and hand-colored with watercolors
Display type and text type set in Ossian, P22 Dwiggens Uncial, and Catull
Color separations by Chroma Graphics, Singapore
Manufactured by Regent Publishing Services, Hong Kong
Printed February 2010 in ShenZhen, Guangdong, China
Production supervision by Brian G. Walker
Designed by Diane M. Earley

How lovely it is today!
The sunlight flickers and breaks
on the margin of my lined book,
while a wall of woodland overlooks
a blackbird singing from the willow—
a bird, a branch, a mass of yellow.

ISBN 978-1-58089-179-0
51795
9 781580 891790